Principals' Perceptions of Self-Efficacy as Crisis Planners

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Schools are entrusted to provide a safe and orderly environment for students each day. Should an emergency occur, it is expected that school leaders and staff respond immediately, deliberately, and effectively. Experts agree that it is imperative that schools are prepared for these events; however, crisis planning is complex and challenging work that can feel overwhelming to school administrators. While a substantial body of research has established that one's efficacy beliefs determine aspirations, motivations, and accomplishments within a particular area, little is known about school leaders' perceptions of self-efficacy in the area of crisis planning. This paper provides a descriptive analysis of elementary school principals' perceptions of self-efficacy in their role as crisis planners.

Study participants included ten elementary school principals, currently leading public schools within the K-5 grade range and located in a Mid-Atlantic State, who have had experience(s) with crisis planning for their school or district. The participants completed a short demographic survey and a 45-minute semi-structured interview. Interviews included 14 open-ended questions exploring their thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to school crisis planning.

A review of the findings revealed that principals have a wide variety of lived experiences managing crisis incidents that impact their school communities. Yet, they have limited exposure to and understanding of comprehensive, multi-hazard crisis planning. Their involvement in crisis planning has focused almost exclusively on preparing for violent intruders. Given their

experiences, many principals perceive crisis planning to be synonymous with implementing violent intruder/options-based security response protocols. Additionally, the study established that principals' efficacy beliefs in the area of crisis planning have been heavily influenced by first responders, previous experiences both within and outside of the field of education, and their emotional responses related to school crisis incidents and planning experiences. Also revealed in the study is the troublingly limited role that district-level leaders play in developing principals' sense of efficacy as crisis planners.

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Preface

It has been said that every journey begins with a single step. And while I understand the meaning of the metaphor—I'm not sure that I entirely agree. A single step implies that the journeyperson is traveling alone. In my experience, no journey has ever been a solo endeavor.

Perhaps I'm just fortunate, but throughout my life I have always traveled with a squad of supportive, caring people. Some are physically taking the journey with me, while others are carried in my heart and spirit. Often, we walk together side by side. And when I've needed encouragement to keep going or have started to go astray, they've been there to give me a gentle nudge to keep me moving forward. Sometimes, they are out there blazing the trail ahead, leaving behind a clear path for me to follow. And on occasion, when the weight of the journey has been too heavy to bear alone, they have offered a shoulder to lean on to help lessen the load. My journey to this completed dissertation has been no different. It did not begin with one single step from me. Rather, there were thousands of footsteps that led me to the starting point of this process, and thousands more to get me to the finish line.

To my committee chair and advisor, Dr. Mary Margaret Kerr, I offer my most sincere appreciation for your expert guidance, strong leadership, incredible patience, and relentless belief in me. The lessons I have learned from you stretch well beyond this dissertation process. I feel so fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from you over the past few years.

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project. Thank you for your thoughtful comments and positive encouragement. Dr. Lepore, the work you've done to support others during times of crisis is both inspiring and admirable. Your knowledge and experience in counseling psychology, supervision, and crisis management were critical to making this project a success. Thank you for your mentorship, thought-provoking questions, and generous feedback.

As it goes with many journeys, the traveler can become a little weary along the way. It can be helpful for a fresh set of eyes to look at the map on occasion and offer insight. For this journey, that fresh set of eyes belongs to the editor of this dissertation, Sarah Dugan. Sarah, it has been an absolute joy to work with you. Thank you for your assistance in bringing this project to fruition.

To my family, friends, colleagues, teachers, and mentors, I am deeply grateful to each and every one of you for being a part of this incredible journey. Without your support and encouragement, earning this degree would not have been possible. To my fellow doctoral students who have made this trek alongside me for the past three years, you are inspirational, passionate educational leaders and I'm proud to have you in my squad. I look forward to what the future holds for each of you—congratulations on all you've accomplished!

And finally, to my eternal North Stars. My parents. I wouldn't be who I am, or where I am, without the incredible foundation of love and support you gave me. Thank you for always believing in me, even when I didn't believe in myself. Thank you for never letting me settle for less than my best. For teaching me that nothing great was ever achieved without taking a risk. That mistakes and missteps are an inevitable part of life, proof that you're trying, and are often your most powerful teacher—then once you know better, it's your responsibility to do better. Thank you for teaching me to find joy in life's simplest moments and to live each day to the

absolute fullest. Though our time together on earth was cut far too short, your love and light continue to guide me on my journey, and for that, I'm forever grateful.

1.0 Introduction

Although schools are very safe places, they are not immune from crises (Brock et al., 2016). "Because exposure to a crisis has the potential to negatively affect student behavior, social emotional adjustment, and education, crisis preparedness is essential" (Brock et al., 2016, p. 36). As the demand for effective crisis management and safety in schools remains a high priority for educators, students, families, and communities, school leaders will continue to feel pressure to perform in this capacity. McCarty (2012) notes that creating comprehensive emergency operations plans is only a part of crisis preparedness. "In order for successful crisis response procedures to be implemented, educational leaders must have confidence and preparation to take charge and manage a crisis situation" (McCarty, 2012, p. 38).

Efficacy beliefs influence how we think, feel, and behave (Bandura, 1993). Those who have higher perceived levels of efficacy tend to envision themselves achieving success, which can then be used to help guide their performance. They also tend to be more motivated and optimistic in their thinking (Bandura, 1989). Those who do not judge themselves to be efficacious are more likely to assume failure from the onset, which can in turn undermine performance efforts (Bandura, 1989, p. 1176). Additionally, lower levels of perceived self-efficacy have a direct effect on the levels of stress and depression experienced during challenging situations (Bandura, 1989).

While research indicates that self-efficacy plays a powerful role in behavioral intentions, little is known about school leaders' perceptions of self-efficacy in the key competencies associated with school crisis and safety planning (Avery & Park, 2016; McCarty, 2012). The goal of this study is to better understand what principals need in order to develop higher levels of self-

efficacy in the key competencies of crisis planning, so that programming can be designed to best prepare and support our school leaders.

2.0 Literature Review

Perceptions of self-efficacy affect one's thought patterns, emotional reactions, and behavior (Bandura, 1982). Those who believe themselves to possess the skills, knowledge, and/or experience to succeed with a given task, are likely to engage and persist with the necessary work (Bandura, 1982). Conversely, if the circumstances are perceived to be more complex than their current level of competence, people are apt to experience higher levels of stress and anxiety, put forth less effort, and may avoid the situation altogether (Bandura, 1989). Since much of human behavior is influenced by the level of confidence in one's own abilities, perceived levels of self-efficacy play a pivotal role in determining whether a person or project will succeed.

In their daily work, school leaders engage in a variety of tasks and are constantly making decisions that impact their school communities. These decisions can range from whether to have indoor or outdoor recess on a given day, to determining a strategic plan for implementing a new initiative, or how to best support a student who is in distress. Though less frequent, a growing area of focus for school leaders is crisis management (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010). School crisis planning is a complex task that requires strong collaboration and communication skills, a deep understanding of recommended emergency preparedness protocols, and a keen awareness of the needs of the community and its stakeholders. School leaders' perceived level of self-efficacy in these competencies will have a direct impact on their ability to persist, and ultimately succeed, throughout the school crisis planning process.

2.1 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's beliefs in their ability to be effective and/or successful within a given context (Bandura, 2006). Because people differ in the areas in which they develop their knowledge and skills, efficacy is not a universal trait (Bandura, 2006). For example, a person may believe they are efficacious in their ability to run a marathon because they have developed strong physical endurance skills over time. While this individual is likely in good physical condition, they may lack efficacy in their ability to win a weightlifting contest. Similarly, a student may exhibit high levels of self-efficacy for learning math, but lower levels for reading and writing. A teacher may feel confident in her ability to effectively build relationships with students and manage the classroom but feel less certain about her data analysis and instructional planning skills.

Personal efficacy is developed based upon four sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1989). As Bandura (1977) noted, performance accomplishments, or instances of prior success at having accomplished something that is similar to the new behavior, can be especially influential to the development of one's sense of personal efficacy. In the aforementioned example of the runner, successfully completing races at shorter distances (e.g., 10K, half marathon) can increase one's belief that completing a marathon is an achievable task. However, failed attempts at completing these races can negatively impact the runner's sense of efficacy as a marathoner. Personal accomplishments are the most effective way to create a strong sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

While a slightly less dependable source of information about one's abilities, self-efficacy can also be developed through vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1989). Simply put, people learn

by watching others. If people of widely differing characteristics can succeed at a task, then observers have a reasonable basis for increasing their own sense of self-efficacy for the same task (Bandura, 1977). For example, an elementary teacher who watches her colleagues analyze student achievement reports and create an intervention plan for students may begin to feel more confident in her own ability to effectively make data-driven instructional decisions.

Often, efficacy develops through verbal persuasion, or encouragement from others (Bandura, 1989). According to Bandura (1977), the impact of verbal persuasion varies significantly depending on the perceived credibility of the person who is offering the encouragement, including their reputation, reliability, expertise, and confidence, among others. Bandura (1977) cautions that self-efficacy developed by means of verbal suggestion can be easily negated if the person experiences contradictory outcomes in their actual performances. For instance, a young student's perception of self-efficacy for writing can be increased under the guidance and mentorship of a well-respected English teacher. This shift in confidence may be reversed, however, if the student receives negative feedback on his writing ability from other instructors.

Finally, Bandura (1989) suggests that our emotional state also plays a key role in the development of our perceptions of self-efficacy. When faced with different situations, people rely on their physical and emotional reactions as a way of judging their ability to cope with the situation (Bandura, 1977). For instance, stress and tension evoke an emotional and sometimes physical response from people, which influences the way they assess their sense of competency within the environment (Bandura, 1977). As a result, they may perceive that they lack the ability to successfully navigate the circumstances and choose to avoid the situation. Doing so, however, inhibits the development of coping skills and personal efficacy for persevering through challenging

circumstances (Bandura, 1977). On the other hand, persisting through experiences that evoke strong emotional reactions can help to develop one's perception of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). In the example of the elementary teacher, attending a meeting to discuss a student's progress with parents and the building principal may arouse feelings of stress, especially since the meeting will focus on the components of her professional practice about which she feels less efficacious. Avoiding the meeting may reinforce these feelings, while preparing for and participating in the discussion could lead to increased levels of perceived self-efficacy.

Our efficacy beliefs influence how we think, feel, and behave (Bandura, 1993). According to Bandura (1977), "people will approach, explore, and try to deal with situations within their self-perceived capabilities, but they will avoid transactions with stressful aspects of their environment they perceive as exceeding their ability" (p. 203). Furthermore, perceptions of self-efficacy impact the expectations that people have going into certain situations (Bandura, 1989). Bandura (1989) notes that those who have higher perceived levels of efficacy tend to envision themselves achieving success, which can then be used to help guide their performance. They also tend to be more motivated and optimistic in their thinking (Bandura, 1989). Those who do not judge themselves to be efficacious are more likely to assume failure from the onset, which can in turn undermine performance efforts (Bandura, 1989, p. 1176). Additionally, lower levels of perceived self-efficacy have a direct effect on the levels of stress and depression experienced during challenging situations (Bandura, 1989).

In summary, much of human behavior is influenced by our confidence in our own capabilities. Those with stronger perceived levels of self-efficacy set higher goals and remain more steadfast in their commitment to them (Bandura, 1989).

2.2 Role of Schools in Crisis Management

In the complicated and often high-stakes climate of public K-12 education today, it is critical that school leaders develop and sustain strong levels of self-efficacy. Today's principals are tasked with being educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, masters of data analysis and assessment literacy, behavior specialists, community builders, public relations experts, budget analysts, facilities managers, and oversee legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. Additionally, they are expected to balance the interests of key stakeholder groups, such as parents, teachers, students, district officials, unions, and state and federal agencies, who often have competing priorities. They must do all of this without wavering from their primary goal of meeting the wide range of student needs within their school (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005).

One area of school leadership in which self-efficacy is particularly relevant is crisis management. Each day schools are entrusted to provide a safe and orderly environment for the nearly 55 million students attending K-12 schools across the nation (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). According to Kerr and King (2018), "a school crisis is a temporary event or condition that affects a school, causing individuals to experience fear, helplessness, shock, and/or horror. A school crisis requires extraordinary actions to restore psychological and physical security" (p. 1). Throughout the literature, definitions of school crisis often have three overlapping characteristics: (a) an unexpected disruption to a school's normal routines, that (b) result in some level of psychological distress, and (c) require action that surpasses the school's typical response, (Kerr & King, 2018). It is important to note that the origin of the crisis does not need to be within the school context. Situations occurring outside of the school and/or community can still create a crisis environment for a school (Kerr & King, 2018).

Incidents of school violence garner intense media attention, which has contributed to a societal misperception about the prevalence of violence in American schools (Cornell, 2003). Borum et al. (2010) note that public fear has driven dramatic shifts and increased scrutiny of security-related policies and procedures that have been developed and implemented in our schools (p. 27). Federal and state legislators have enacted policy mandates that increase accountability measures for schools and districts to maintain school safety (Olinger Steeves, Metallo, Byrd, Erickson, & Gresham, 2017). However, these mandates often lack specific guidelines or recommendations for implementation, leaving district and school officials to interpret the mandates to the best of their abilities (Olinger Steeves et al., 2017).

Should an emergency occur, schools are expected to respond immediately, deliberately, and effectively (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). While experts in crisis prevention and intervention agree that it is imperative for schools to be prepared for these events, crisis planning is complex and challenging work (Olinger Steeves et al., 2017). Fortunately, as district and school leaders embark on the task of creating or revising their crisis plans, there are a number of high-quality resources available to provide guidance to crisis leadership teams (Kerr & King, 2018).

2.3 2007 Assessment of Crisis Management in U.S. School Districts

In 2007, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) published the findings of its comprehensive assessment of emergency management in school districts. The study included interviews with federal officials, a review of relevant documents, site visits and surveys of a stratified random sample of all public school districts, as well as surveys of state education and administering agencies (GAO, 2007). In response to concerns about emergency management in

school districts coming from Congress, the GAO sought to better understand: "(1) the roles and responsibilities of federal and state governments and school districts in establishing requirements and providing resources to school districts for emergency management planning, (2) what school districts have done to plan and prepare for emergencies, and (3) the challenges, if any, school districts have experienced in planning for emergencies, and communicating and coordinating with first responders, parents, and students" (2007, p. 2).

According to the final report, most states and school districts reported having requirements for emergency planning, despite such mandates being absent from federal law (GAO, 2007). While an estimated 95 percent of all school districts had written emergency management plans in place, the GAO (2007) found that many were not based upon the federal guidance for emergency preparedness. For instance, fewer than half of all school districts surveyed collaborated with local head of government and local public health agencies in the development of their plans. Additionally, most districts reported practicing their emergency procedures within the school community; however, it was estimated that over 25 percent of districts never trained with community partners or first responders, and more than 66 percent of districts did not do so on a regular basis (GAO, 2007). Finally, while approximately half of districts reported updating their EOPs at least once per year, an estimated 10 percent had never reviewed or revised their plans since they were initially developed (GAO, 2007).

A key finding of this study was that approximately 70 percent of all school districts surveyed reported struggling to balance emergency management planning with the priorities of educating students and other administrative responsibilities. According to the GAO (2007), these challenges manifested in a variety of ways, including: insufficient time available to dedicate to emergency management training for staff; lack of equipment or knowledge of how to use existing

equipment; limited funding; poor or no collaboration among community partners, first responders, and other area school districts; and difficulty communicating with parents and families (GAO, 2007).

In response to their assessment, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2007) provided several recommendations. First, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security should ensure that state and local governments are aware that funds can be distributed to school districts under the State Homeland Security Program, Urban Areas Security Initiative, and Citizen Corps programs. Next, federal guidance should be provided to school districts for ensuring that procedures are in place for two specific areas: (a) assisting students with special needs during emergencies, and (b) continuing education in the event of an extended school closure. Finally, to promote collaborative training among school districts, first responders, and community partners, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Department of Education should identify and mitigate factors that prevent this from occurring (GAO, 2007).

2.4 School Crisis Planning Guidance

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students, operates the Readiness and Emergency Management for School (REMS) Technical Assistance Center, which provides resources for guiding schools through the development of comprehensive emergency operations plans (EOPs). The *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* was published in 2013. The result of a collaboration among the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Federal

Emergency Management Agency, these guidelines serve as a roadmap to help school and district leaders collaborate with local government and community partners to develop comprehensive school emergency operations plans (EOPs).

The recommendations in the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* (2013) reflect lessons learned from various national emergencies (e.g. terroristic attacks, natural disasters, school incidents) and are aligned to *Presidential Policy Directive (PPD) 8*, which was signed by the President in March of 2011 and describes the nation's approach to emergency preparedness. Focusing on five key elements of emergency preparedness: prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery, the guidelines introduce educators to key vocabulary, processes, and approaches used by our nation's first responders and emphasize the importance of their use to ensure protocols can be universally understood (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). By following the recommendations provided in these guidelines, district and school leaders can more effectively work with first responders and their communities to a safe and secure school environment.

"Effective school emergency management planning and development of a school EOP are not done in isolation" (U.S. Department of Education, 2013, p. 5). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2013), the first step to developing an emergency operations plan is to form a collaborative team. It is imperative that school leaders engage representatives from key stakeholder groups on this team, including district staff (e.g., administrators, teachers, school psychologists, nurses, facilities managers), community partners (e.g., law enforcement, fire officials, emergency medical services, public and mental health officials, local emergency managers), students (if appropriate), and families. Developing a team that is large enough to

represent the entire school community, yet small enough for all voices to be heard requires a leader who has a strong understanding of the organization and its stakeholders.

Once established, the planning team develops the framework that will be used throughout the EOPs, including deciding upon common vocabulary and communication structures. School leaders help to facilitate team discussions to identify and assess the risk posed by potential threats and hazards to the school and surrounding community (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). According to Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), effective leaders know the value of gathering multiple perspectives to consider the needs of all members of the organization. "People at all levels in the enterprise must be able to acknowledge what they do not know and need to discover. In today's world, even the most experienced experts are in over their heads" (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 105-106). As principals take on the task of crisis planning for their schools, it is important that they establish a culture where there is a collective commitment to learning with and from each other (Heifetz et al., 2009). Seeking input from local, state, and federal agencies and gathering historical data about threats that have impacted the community in the past can help the group to generate a robust yet reasonable list of potential hazards to consider (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Establishing and maintaining a culture of open dialogue and collaboration is a critical component to leading crisis planning efforts. Not only will it increase the school's access to resources, but it also helps to ensure that all entities are working cooperatively should an emergency occur (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

In addition to strong collaboration skills, crisis planning requires that leaders be effective communicators. Protocols must be written using clear and concise language so that they can be easily understood in high pressure situations (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The U.S.

Department of Education (2013) recommends summarizing information in a logical, consistent format using visual aids, flowcharts, maps, and/or checklists to make it easily understood (p. 18).

After finalizing the school EOP and obtaining official approval from district and local leadership, school leaders must communicate the contents of the plan to necessary stakeholder groups throughout the community (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). An essential element to this phase of the planning process is ensuring that key stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities in an emergency scenario. Additionally, leaders must provide the training necessary for members of the organization to fulfill these roles (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Developing a plan for disseminating the contents of the EOP and providing adequate support to all stakeholders requires that crisis leaders understand the needs of their audience (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Another important element of crisis planning is developing a communication plan. According to Kerr and King (2018), anticipating the attitudes and priorities of the audience(s) can help leaders deliver clear, calming messages during a crisis incident. Preparing draft messages in advance of a crisis incident enables the organization to convey an accurate, succinct, and clear message to stakeholders (Kerr & King, 2018). When crafting message templates, leaders should consider the following elements: (a) the information that will be needed and how it will be accessed during an emergency, (b) the distribution method, (c) the timeline for disseminating information, and (d) the person who will be charged with sending the messages (Kerr & King, 2018).

2.5 Crisis Leadership Competencies for School Leaders

In the wake of incidents of school violence, media attention and public fear have led to an increased focus on school safety across the nation (Cornell, 2003; Borum et al., 2010). As Trump (2008) notes parents may be forgiving if student achievement and test scores go down. They will be much less forgiving if something happens to their child that could have been avoided with better planning or management. The responsibility for preventing potential threats to the school environment, identifying safety gaps, planning and budgeting for security, and training staff rests upon the shoulders of school leaders (Trump, 2008).

Effective school crisis management requires that leaders be proficient with a wide range of key competencies and related skills. A review of the literature provided relevant skills from multiple sources. From the three sources selected, the competencies have been categorized into each phase of crisis response: prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery (see Tables 1-5).

Table 1. Crisis Prevention: Competencies and Related Skills

Competency	Related Skills
Establish a comprehensive school safety team	• Define roles and responsibilities • Collaborate with outside emergency response agencies and key stakeholder groups • Focus on the big picture of school climate and culture • Help link safety initiatives to academic and social-emotional programming • Promote safe, supportive, and effective schools
Conduct a comprehensive safety audit	• Examine the safety, accessibility, and emergency preparedness of the school's building and grounds through a site assessment • Evaluate student and staff perceptions of safety, connectedness to the school, and problem behaviors (culture and climate assessment) • Analyze communication and behaviors of staff, students, and others to identify whether a person may pose a threat (threat assessment) • Audit the capabilities of students and staff, as well as the services and material resources available to the school (capacity assessment) • Identify outside threats and hazards, as well as common incidents that occur inside the school
Operate in perpetual state of awareness	• Gather data from multiple sources regularly • Ask clarifying and probing questions • Collect information through supervision • Collect intelligence through surveillance
Filter and use information responsibly	• Listen from diverse voices and points of view • Avoid biases and remain open minded • Sift through information in a timely manner • Determine credibility of information/sources • Summarize findings in clear, concise manner • Communicate information to stakeholder groups using language that is easily understood

Table 1 (continued)

Assess potential risk	• Determine who or what is at risk • Identify risk factors or warning signs • Evaluate the seriousness of the risk/danger • Determine how much time is available
Protect physical and psychological safety among school community	• Implement a bullying prevention program • Integrate social-emotional learning into the academic program • Create a nurturing environment of safety and respect • Facilitate peer mediation and conflict resolution • Ensure that every student has one adult mentor at school

Table 2. Crisis Protection: Competencies and Related Skills

Competency	Related Skills
Facilitate the school safety team	• Provide leadership and support to staff, students, and school community on school safety efforts • Support the procedures and programs that promote a safe, respectful, and inclusive school environment • Evaluate implementation efforts and other safety assessment data
Develop a safety and crisis plan	• Design primary interventions that promote wellness and prevent problems within the school community • Identify targeted interventions and supports for students who are struggling academically, emotionally, socially, and/or behaviorally • Engage the resources and skills of community-based professionals • Conduct regular safety drills and exercises • Engage in after-action reviews following planned drills or safety/security related incidents • Modify safety and crisis plans according to feedback from drills and exercises
Establish daily routines/procedures to secure the building	• Control access to the building by locking exterior doors and establishing procedures for visitors • Ensure there is adequate lighting throughout the school building and grounds • Install and monitor cameras to provide additional surveillance • Establish system(s) for communicating throughout the building (e.g., PA system, two-way radios)
Provide ongoing professional development related to school safety	• Identify specific staff development needs • Communicate staff roles and responsibilities related to school safety/security • Establish system for collecting and evaluating data related to school climate and safety
Create board policy and procedures	• Craft policy to support psychological and physical safety of the school community • Consider liability issues

Table 3. Crisis Mitigation: Competencies and Related Skills

Competency	Related Skills
Develop a crisis communication plan	• Establish roles and responsibilities for communicating during and following a crisis • Be timely, accurate, and credible with messages • Establish a rumor control hotline • Prepare for crisis team debriefing
Remain educated on best practices	• Reflect upon past experiences • Consult with experts in the field of crisis management • Review current research and guidance from government agencies
Prepare emergency drills and crisis exercises for staff, students, and emergency responders	• Conduct drills or readiness checks • Plan action steps to protect safety of staff and students during various emergency incidents • Develop accountability and student release procedures • Provide staff with necessary equipment and information to respond to a crisis • Provide access to directory of local, state, and national resources • Create site maps and facility information for emergency responders

Table 4. Crisis Response: Competencies and Related Skills

Competency	Related Skills
Assume role of incident commander and respond to crisis	• Remain calm • Verify the facts, asses and identify the crisis, and determine the appropriate level of response • Provide immediate crisis interventions to ensure physical and psychological safety • Make rapid decisions under highly stressful conditions • Remain in position of incident commander until relieved by proper authority
Assess the effectiveness of tactics/strategies	• Listen to your audiences and learn what they need • Anticipate what could happen next and adjust the plan accordingly • Modify plans as necessary • Develop alternative solutions to a problem and understand the costs and benefits • Balance response initiatives with safety concerns • Document action during response
Communicate with all stakeholders	• Motivate responders • Instill follower confidence (empowering followers in a crisis) • Disseminate crisis information • Communicate clear directions • Notify appropriate emergency responders • Debrief with staff and crisis team to develop plan for short-term needs • Negotiate and demonstrate conflict resolution skills • Display interpersonal sensitivity • Consider cultural influences and implications • Work with other incident commanders in a unified command system

Table 4 (continued)

Facilitate assistance to victims and crisis team (i.e., medical, psychological, basic supports)	• Provide victim assistance • Address medical needs • Assess psychological trauma and provide crisis intervention services • Support a crisis team (basic supports) • Hold intervention sessions with the crisis response team members

Table 5. Crisis Recovery: Competencies and Related Skills

Competency	Related Skills
Return to structure and routine as quickly as feasible	• Conduct safety audit to determine if repairs are necessary • Provide support and reassurance to members of the school community • Communicate with staff, students, families, and community regarding physical and psychological supports • Return students to learning as quickly as possible • Determine recovery time (may take months or years) • Plan for memorial activities (establish guidelines and parameters if necessary)
Communicate with media and community	• Keep students, families, and the media informed • Reinforce safety measures being implemented • Conduct regular debriefings for staff, responders, and others assisting in recovery
Assess emotional needs of staff, students, families, and responders	• Identify individuals at risk of psychological trauma • Provide the opportunity for crisis intervention • Provide stress management during class time • Provide the opportunity for group crisis intervention • Provide the opportunity for individual crisis intervention
Evaluate and consider future implications of crisis and response	• Collaborate with stakeholders and community support agencies • Plan for long-term needs • Be mindful of anniversaries and other reminders • Evaluate effectiveness of crisis plan • Continue to monitor school climate and culture data

Notes: Adapted from Brock et al. (2016); Kerr & King (2018); McCarty (2012)

2.6 School Leaders' Self Efficacy in Crisis Planning

Brock et al. (2016) identifies the ability to accurately estimate the required level of crisis response as another critical competency for school crisis planning. Misjudging the response to a crisis event can have dangerous consequences for stakeholders. Overreacting may increase threat perceptions and levels of stress among students, staff, and the community. Conversely, underreacting to an event may result in stakeholders' needs going unmet and resources being wasted. "Although progress has been made, a continued focus on safety efforts is needed to ensure that schools are prepared for a variety of potential crisis situations" (Brock et al., 2016, p. 41).

Unfortunately, there are many potential obstacles that schools face when planning for crises. Among these challenges is a sense of denial that still exists in many schools. The belief that "it won't happen here" leads many schools to wait until a crisis has occurred before beginning the process of planning for school safety (Brock, Sandoval, & Lewis, 2001). Limited resources, such as time for planning, training professionals, and securing funding, are also ongoing challenges for schools. It is not uncommon for school safety initiatives to be set aside in the face of academic initiatives (Brock et al., 2016). According to Gurdineer (2013), even when schools develop crisis plans, they often lack the elements necessary for achieving crisis prevention, intervention, and postvention goals. Other obstacles that impact school crisis planning efforts include territorial issues, insufficient use of school-employed mental health professionals' expertise, and misguided priorities (Brock et al., 2016).

Considering all that is involved in the process as well as the many obstacles, crisis preparedness efforts can feel overwhelming to school administrators and leaders (Brock et al., 2016). As Bandura (1982) notes, if a task is perceived to be more complex than one's current level of competence, people experience higher levels of stress and anxiety, put forth less effort, and may

avoid the project altogether. Conversely, when people believe they have the skills and circumstances necessary to succeed, they are more likely to persist with a task and ultimately achieve their goals (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1982; Bandura, 1989). Although research suggests that self-efficacy is a powerful predictor of positive outcomes, little is known about school leaders' perceptions of self-efficacy as school crisis and safety leaders.

3.0 Methods

This chapter explains the theoretical framework, problem under investigation, and research questions, then outlines the interview protocol and explains the analytic approach used to answer the research questions. Current research on self-efficacy and school crisis prevention and intervention creates the theoretical framework for this study. While researchers have studied both self-efficacy and school crisis prevention and intervention, there is little information about school leaders' perceptions of self-efficacy in the area of crisis planning. This qualitative study sought to better understand elementary school principals' thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to school crisis planning.

3.1 Inquiry Questions

The following inquiry questions helped to better understand how self-efficacy influences elementary school principals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to school crisis and safety planning:

Question 1: What experience(s) have elementary school principals had related to planning for school crisis and safety?

Question 2: What are elementary school principals' perceptions of their abilities related to planning for school crisis and safety?

Question 3: What do elementary school principals say they need to develop higher levels of self-efficacy in planning for school crisis and safety?

3.2 Research Protocol

3.2.1 Participants, recruitment, and consent

A total of ten elementary school principals from schools located in a Mid-Atlantic State were recruited to participate in this study. Participants included current building leaders serving within the K-8 grade range, with at least one calendar year of experience in their current position.

The sample was drawn from a regional consortium of public school districts located within a 15-mile radius of a Mid-Atlantic State. To begin, I obtained a list of school leaders and email addresses by visiting the websites of school districts within the consortium. Participants were recruited using a standard recruitment script (see Appendix A) sent via email. Interested participants who met the eligibility criteria responded to the recruitment email. Once communication was established, individual interviews were scheduled and a copy of the informed consent letter (see Appendix B) was provided. Participation in this study was voluntary and no compensation or incentives were offered to participants.

Before beginning each interview, an additional copy of the consent letter was provided to participants. Time was allocated to review the details of the consent letter with participants and allow them to voice any questions or concerns. Before beginning the interviews, I ensured that participants' questions had been addressed. They were also reminded of their right to opt out of any question(s) or withdraw from the interview at any time without negative consequence.

3.2.2 Data collection

Qualitative, semi-structured, individual interviews were used to gain further insight into the experiences and perceptions of principals at the elementary level. The individual interviews included open-ended questions (see Table 6) designed to elicit information about participants' experiences and perceptions related to school crisis and safety planning. Typical background information, including gender, job role, and years of experience was collected using a brief paper survey (see Appendix C). The data gathered from the survey was used to describe the sample.

Private interviews were scheduled at a convenient time and location for the participant. Interviews were conducted in a private, quiet space, away from potential disturbances. The interview sessions ranged between 23-66 minutes, with an average length of 42 minutes. Nine of the ten interviews were conducted in person. One interview was completed over the phone, due to social distancing restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview script appears in Appendix D.

Table 6. Inquiry and Interview Question Map

Inquiry Question	Interview Question
1 & 2	I'm wondering, since you've been a principal, have you ever responded to a crisis that affected your school community (i.e., death of a staff member/student, bus accident, medical emergency, severe weather/natural disaster, violence)? Can you walk me through your experience? Probe: How did you feel during this time? Probe (if necessary): How was the crisis resolved?
2	In your opinion, was this a successful resolution? Probe: What makes you say that?
1	Can you tell me when this incident occurred in your career?
1	I'm curious to hear about any of the ways you have been involved in crisis planning for your school or district. What can you tell me about your involvement?
1	What did you use to figure out this plan?
2	On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being absolutely confident in your planning, and 1 being very unsure) how well do you think you did in this role? *If necessary*: What makes you say that?
1	Did you get any feedback from others? *If necessary:* Can you share the feedback you received?
2	How did that feedback make you feel?
1 & 2	How do you think you learned how to do crisis planning?
1	Can you tell me about any training opportunities, workshops, or reading you've completed on school crisis and safety planning that you haven't already mentioned?
2 & 3	Thinking about all of your experiences, which have helped you in your ability to plan for school crisis and safety? *If necessary:* Why do these experiences stand out as being the most influential?
3	Are there skills/concepts that you would like to learn to be more confident in crisis planning? In general, using the same 1-5 scale (with 5 being absolutely confident in your planning, and 1 being very unsure), how would you rate your level of confidence in your role as elementary school principal?

An electronic audio recording device was used during the interviews to aid in the transcription process. Written transcripts of each interview were assigned a unique identification number and pseudonym to protect participants' anonymity. All collected data remained password protected and stored in secure cloud storage. Field notes and participant responses documented during the interview sessions were also collected for two primary purposes; to serve as redundant data in the event of audio failure, and as anecdotal notes on participants' non-verbal communication. No personal or school/district identifying information was recorded on any of the data collection. Participants reserved the right to opt out of any question(s) or withdraw from the interview at any time, without negative consequence.

3.2.3 Data analysis

Data analysis began by uploading the interview audio files to a secure cloud-based storage application. The audio files were transcribed for clarity, omitting stutters, false starts, and repetitions. I reread the interview transcripts multiple times, in order to "get a sense for the whole database" (Creswell, 2013, p. 183). The interview transcriptions were then uploaded to Dedoose, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program.

Next, the interview transcripts were coded using an initial codebook derived from Bandura's concepts of self-efficacy. I also utilized memoing to keep track of thoughts, questions, and interesting quotes found in the data (Mertens, 2010). As Saldana (2009) notes, "coding is a cyclical process that requires you to recode not just once but twice (and sometimes even more)" (p. 29). Emerging concepts and patterns were identified and tested against the collected data, using a constant comparative method (Mertens, 2010). Additional codes were added to more accurately

capture data from specific interview questions. Subcodes were created to further define responses. The final codebook with primary codes, subcodes, and descriptions is included in Table 7.

Table 7. Code Description Key

Primary Code	Description	Subcode
Performance Accomplishment	Refers to instances of prior success at having accomplished something similar	Current Role Previous Role Unspecified
Vicarious Experience	Refers to learning as a result of observing the behavior/actions of others	Colleague Expert in the Field Faculty Expert First Responder Supervisor Training
Verbal Persuasion	Refers to encouragement/feedback from others	Colleague Community Expert in the Field Law Enforcement Supervisee Supervisor
Emotional Response	Refers to physical and/or emotional reaction to a particular experience	Calm Distress Overwhelm Steadfast Uncertainty

Table 7 (continued)

Crisis Experiences	Refers to crisis incidents reported by participants	Child Welfare Concern Death with School Community Medical Emergency Natural Disaster Threat to School Violence/Threat in Community Violent Intruder/Active Shooter
Crisis Planning Experiences	Refers to experiences related to school crisis planning reported by participants	Child Welfare Concern Fire General School Crisis and Safety Concern Medical Emergency Severe Weather Violent Intruder/Options-Based Security Response

It was important for me to remain aware of the limitations of credibility, confirmability, and dependability throughout the data analysis process. Creswell (2013) suggests that increasing credibility requires, "extensive time spent in the field, the detailed thick descriptions, and the closeness of the researcher to participants in the study" (p. 250). Achieving these credibility strategies required ongoing engagement with the collected data, and persistent, astute observations throughout the analysis process to accurately capture the findings.

According to Mertens (2010), research confirmability occurs when the data is an accurate representation of the inquiry being investigated and not a "figment of the researcher's imagination" (p. 389). Clear and objective procedures for data collection and storage were maintained

throughout the study. Additionally, I remained aware of personal assumptions and biases throughout the data analysis process.

Finally, dependability is achieved when consistency of the findings is observed over time. Transparency and proper documentation are necessary to maintain dependability. All data were recorded accurately and with integrity. Additionally, data were regularly reviewed with the research mentor throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the study to ensure dependability.

4.0 Findings

The primary aim of this research study was to better understand elementary school principals' thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to school crisis planning. This chapter begins with a review of the research questions and description of the study participants. Following this review, the chapter outlines, by research question, the participants' responses. To provide a general understanding of the findings, a description of the most frequently coded interview responses is included. The final section provides a discussion on the interpretation of the participants' experiences and perspectives related to planning for school crisis.

To recall, the following research questions framed this research study:

- What experience(s) have elementary school principals had related to planning for school crisis and safety?
- What are elementary school principals' perceptions of their abilities related to planning for school crisis and safety?
- What do elementary school principals say they need to develop higher levels of self-efficacy in planning for school crisis and safety?

The researcher conducted ten semi-structured interviews with elementary school principals who have had experience(s) with crisis planning for their school or district. These leaders currently serve as building principals within the K-5 grade range, in public school districts located within a 15-mile radius of a Mid-Atlantic State. Participants' represent a total of 91 years of experience in the role of principal, ranging from one to 20 years. Table 8 provides a summary of the background information collected from the study participants.

Table 8. Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Grade Range of School	Years of Experience as Principal	Years of Experience as Educator
Bridget	F	2-5	1	5-10
Maeve	F	K-4	20	> 20
Claudia	F	K-5	4	15-20
James	M	K-5	10	15-20
Camilla	F	K-5	14	> 20
Matej	M	K-5	5	15-20
Isaac	M	K-4	16	> 20
Amina	F	K-2	3	15-20
Lena	F	K-2	14	> 20
Sailee	F	K-5	4	15-20

While small, the study's sample is representative of the school leaders who are currently serving K-5 schools across the region and country. The majority of participants have 20+ years of experience in the field of education. They are highly competent, intelligent, passionate, and dedicated to serving their school communities to their very best of their abilities. The diverse experiences and perspectives included in this study help the reader to better understand of the incredibly complex and challenging role principal's play in maintaining a safe school environment for students and staff.

Interviews occurred over an eight-week period, between January and March 2020. It should be noted that at the time this study concluded, the COVID-19 pandemic began. This led to some observations that will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.1 Descriptive Summary of Interview Responses

To provide the reader with a general understanding of the findings, a brief section about the comments most frequently offered, organized by research questions and counts, has been included in this chapter (Sandelowski, 2001).

4.1.1 What experience(s) have elementary school principals had related to planning for school crisis and safety?

To recall, the research question elicited the crisis incidents that participants have experienced that affected their school communities. In total, the participants noted 39 crisis incidents, as revealed in Table 9.

Table 9. School Crisis Incidents Reported by Participants

School Crisis Incident	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Incidents Reported	Number of Participants Reporting
Death within School Community	15	38.5%	7
Violence/Threat in Community	9	23.1%	5
Child Welfare Concern	9	23.1%	4
Medical Emergency	6	15.4%	3
Threat to School	2	5.1%	2
Natural Disaster	1	2.6%	1
Violent Intruder/Active Shooter	0	0.0%	0

The school crisis incident most frequently reported by participants involved the death of a member of the school community. During the interviews, seven of the ten participants spoke about a time when a student, staff member, or parent/guardian of a student passed away. Of the fifteen deaths, 60% (9/15) involved a student, 20% (3/15) involved a staff member, and 20% (3/15) involved a parent/primary caregiver of a student. Isaac shared a time when a student unexpectedly passed away. "Probably the worst one I've dealt with was when we had a student death here. I was with my son and I got a call that said one of our, at that time second graders, was killed in a car accident. The mother was driving to pick up the father, because the father had lost his license to a DUI. They were driving home and another drunk driver hit them. This was late, like 2:00 AM Friday night and I got the call early, early Saturday morning. It definitely rocked my world."

The next most frequently reported school crisis incidents from the interviews related to violence in the community. Half of the participants shared examples of school crisis related to shootings, gang violence, and other police activity that occurred in the vicinity of their schools. Camilla recalled, "There was a day that we had a delayed conference day. The students were arriving at 11:00 AM and we were notified that there had just been a shoot-out [in the neighborhood] at 10:30 in the morning."

Four of the ten participants recalled crisis incidents related to child welfare concerns. Of the nine reported incidents, 33.3% (3/9) involved child abuse or neglect, 33.3% (3/9) involved a child being removed from the primary residence or being placed in a new home environment, 22.2% (2/9) involved the incarceration of a parent or primary caregiver, and 11.1% (1/9) involved substance abuse in the home. Amina discussed navigating a particularly complex situation, "It does add to that layer of stress because now your heart is breaking for this baby that just saw both of his parents handcuffed and taken away. And you know who this kid is and they're crying at the

police station. Then you learn there are so many more layers. There was suspected abuse and now the [child is at] the hospital. So, what does [your day] look like? Do you go? Yes, you go."

Medical emergencies on campus, direct threats to the school, and natural disasters comprised the remaining crises mentioned during the participants' interviews. James shared an incident that had occurred a week prior to the interview. "Just recently, a week ago, we had a boy pass out on the playground. Teachers carried him in. My nurse worked on him. She is also an EMT, so we gave her complete control. We had to get the ambulance there. We locked down the building, told everybody stay in their rooms. My co-principal was on the phone with the family. I was on the phone with the superintendent. Our school police officer was on the phone with emergency services, all trying to coordinate. We eventually got him out of there, got him life-flighted to the hospital."

It should be noted that an additional three crises revealed themselves during coding. These incidents were linked to another crisis situation shared by participants. For example, Claudia reported, "We had a student who shot and killed her dad because he was molesting her over the years." Multiple child codes were applied to the crisis in order to accurately encapsulate the complexity of the incident, bringing the total number of crises reported to 42.

To further answer Research Question One, participants talked about their involvement with crisis planning efforts in their schools or districts. Among the ten participants, involvement in crisis planning was mentioned a total of 37 times. Of these occurrences, 51.4% (19/37) related to planning efforts at the district level, while 48.6% (18/37) were at the building/school level. Table 10 provides a summary of participants' reported involvement in school crisis planning efforts.

Table 10. Participants' Involvement in School Crisis Planning Efforts

Area of Focus	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Total Responses	Number of Participants Reporting
Violent Intruder/ Options-Based Security Response	19	51.4%	10
General School Crisis and Safety Concern	11	29.7%	5
Fire	2	5.4%	2
Severe Weather	2	5.4%	2
Medical Emergency	2	5.4%	2
Child Welfare Concern	1	2.7%	1

Interestingly, every participant mentioned having some involvement in planning for a violent intruder, with more than half of the descriptions focusing on this specific type of crisis incident. Yet only 5% of responses referred to the fire and severe weather drills that schools routinely conduct. Only one participant noted planning for medical emergencies. This is especially interesting because more than 15% of incidents participants reported involved some sort of medical emergency.

4.1.1.1 Vicarious learning

To learn more about participants' experiences, the researcher asked them to share about how they learned to do crisis planning work. Vicarious experience, as defined by Bandura (1977) is learning by watching others. During their interviews, participants referred to examples of vicarious learning a total of 77 times. A summary of the responses is included in Table 11.

Table 11. Participants' Sources of Vicarious Learning for Crisis Planning

Source of Vicarious Learning	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Total Responses	Number of Participants Reporting
Training/Workshop	24	31.2%	9
First Responder	20	26.0%	9
Experts in the Field	15	19.5%	7
Colleague	9	11.7%	6
Faculty Expert	7	9.1%	3
Supervisor	2	2.6%	2

Formal professional development trainings and workshops were the most frequently identified source of vicarious learning related to crisis planning. For example, Maeve explained, "the district brought in ALICE. They also brought in the SROs to lead a workshop that included video clips with different scenarios to work through." James noted additional professional learning opportunities within the context of education. "I mean I don't have it up to date, but I'm a certified CPI trainer. I've done PBIS training. I've done the SAP training; I've done all those different mental health pieces. And I think all those pieces have helped me in my career because I've pulled from SAP, I've pulled from PBIS, and a bit from the CPI. And I think [the skills I've learned in these trainings] help me in other areas too." Another participant, Isaac shared, "There was a FEMA face-to-face [workshop] we did once that was really, really good."

Interestingly, first responders were involved in 26% of vicarious learning references made by participants. This is consistent with the previously discussed responses from participants, which indicate that more than half of participants' crisis planning efforts focus on violent

intruder/active shooter protocols. Further analysis of the data revealed that participants used the term “police” a total of 81 times throughout their interviews. The term “SRO” was mentioned an additional 17 times. It became apparent that participants view their partnership with first responders to be a valuable learning opportunity.

Participants referred to learning from experts in the field in a variety of ways, including listening to a speaker or presentation from organizations within the field of school crisis response, and reading professional articles, books, and other publications. Isaac noted, “I don't want to be lectured to, but the books, I'll read any book, I don't care. I love it.” Collaborating with colleagues and faculty experts were also mentioned by participants.

Finally, it should be noted that the seven references to learning from a faculty expert related to one specific university professor, who is a school crisis authority. Additionally, less than 3% of vicarious learning experiences were connected to a supervisor. These are concerning data points, suggesting that both school- and district-level leaders have limited exposure and understanding of the key competencies of crisis planning, despite being responsible for the task in practice. These are important findings that have implications for practice that will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.1.1.2 Performance accomplishments

Although Bandura (1977) notes that instances of prior success are the most effective way to create a strong sense of self-efficacy, mastery experiences emerged less frequently in participants responses. Only 43 of the responses reflected a previous performance accomplishment, as defined by Bandura. Table 12 shows a summary of these responses.

Table 12. Participants' Sources of Performance Accomplishment for Crisis Planning

Source of Performance Accomplishment	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Total Responses	Number of Participants Reporting
Previous Role	23	53.5%	8
Current Role	17	39.5%	7
Unspecified	3	7.0%	2

The analysis of interviews revealed the majority of mastery experiences mentioned by participants derived from contexts prior to their role as principals. Of the 23 references to mastery experiences occurring in previous roles, 16 were professional contexts. While some of these roles were within the field of education, others were not. One participant, Claudia noted that prior to becoming an educator, "I worked [in social services in the healthcare field for a number of years.] So, [since I dealt with crisis in the emergency room] every single day, I had that background. A lot of their crisis planning [practices], they had it down to a science. I'm sure they've changed many things since then, but I brought some of that stuff with me [to my current role]."

Interestingly, nearly one third of the examples of prior success occurred in contexts unrelated to their roles as educators. For example, Matej shared, "Growing up, I was in Boy Scouts, so [I learned] a lot of like emergency preparedness and things like that. Now that's just the basic level, but it kind of got me interested in that kind of stuff." Another participant, James noted, "My brother's very involved with local law enforcement, so he and I would meet with people to talk about how we can [improve] our security."

4.1.1.3 Implementing a protocol versus crisis planning

At this point, it became clear that participants viewed active intruder protocols as planning for school crisis. In other words, these participants had experience in implementing active intruder protocols, which they conceptualized as "school crisis planning." What appeared in the interviews, as participants walked the interviewer through what they perceived to be "crisis planning," were descriptions of their role of guiding the staff, students, and school community through the implementation of a protocol designed by others.

In fact, active intruder protocols are typically developed not by school principals, but by those in law enforcement. While school leaders may plan small aspects of implementing an active shooter response in their own building and with their staff, crisis planning as defined by this study and experts in the field constitutes a more comprehensive process.

While unexpected, this is an exceptionally important finding with implications for practice. If school principals conceptualize school crisis planning as this more limited role of implementing an existing protocol, the data would suggest that they do not fully understand the widely accepted, multiple phases of crisis planning or the multiple dimensions that should be present in a crisis planning document. For example, a comprehensive crisis plan addresses prevention, mitigation, protection, response, recovery and after action reviews.

Moreover, comprehensive crisis planning addresses *multiple* hazards and situations that can occur in a school. Although the interviewees described multiple crises in which they had *involvement*, most of them referred to crisis *planning* in this more limited scope of implementing an active intruder protocol. As a result, the data analysis hereafter reflects more of the educators' vicarious learning, mastery, feedback, and emotional response related to *participation*, as opposed to crisis planning. In that sense, this is a departure from the original aim of the study. Nevertheless,

their responses tell us much about principals' experiences and perceptions related to crisis response.

4.1.2 What are elementary school principals' perceptions of their abilities related to planning for school crisis and safety?

Once again, these data should be viewed through the lens of how the participants understood crisis planning. To learn more about participants' perceptions, they were asked to share whether the crisis incidents they experienced were resolved successfully. In 100% of the interviews, participants indicated a successful resolution. When asked how they arrived at this conclusion, participants' responses focused primarily on the safety and overall well-being of the students, staff, and school community. For instance, James expressed, "The boy was safe. We got him where he needed to be. He's healthy now. He's back to school. And we worked as a team and that was the best thing. There was no confusion. Nobody was yelling at anybody. There was just no confusion. I mean, it was stressful, but I don't think anybody was stressed out because we all worked together." Another participant, Camilla recalled, "Everybody was safe. The building was safe. There was no emotional fallout from the kids the next day." Lena noted success as, "Every child got home safely. We were communicating with the parents throughout [the situation]."

One participant, Isaac, offered a unique response to the question of resolution, "Resolution is a hard question. Mainly because the resolution would be only in the eye of the beholder. I was happy with the resolution that we got the kid back, but I will never be satisfied with the fact that somebody missed letting that kid go in the first place. So, it depends what you consider resolution. My resolution for that will be, now that that happened, we're going to have to go back and review.

How did it happen? Why did it happen? Yes, we had multiple things going on at the same time, but we still need to do something differently [to make sure it doesn't] happen again."

To further answer Research Question Two, participants were asked to provide a self-rating related to their efforts to plan for school crisis. Participants were asked to identify their confidence level using a Likert scale from 1-5, with 5 being absolutely confident in their planning, and 1 being very unsure. A summary of the participants' responses is included in Table 13.

Table 13. Participants' Self-Rating of Confidence in Crisis Planning Roles

Pseudonym	Self-Rating
Bridget	4
Maeve	3-4
Claudia	4
James	3
Camilla	4
Matej	4
Isaac	4
Amina	3-4
Lena	4-5
Sailee	4

The participants' self-ratings range from neutral (3) to absolutely confident (5). Only one participant offered the highest rating but was hesitant to do so. Lena eventually settled on the highest rating only when drawing a comparison to other districts in the state. "I think it's greater than four, but I don't know if you can ever be at a five. You know? I mean, we've done so much,

and we've got the plans in place and everyone's ready. You know what? I think comparing us to districts across the state, I'm probably going to give us a five. Because of the amount of time, and the depth, and everything that's in place ready to go."

The remaining participants all rated themselves as neutral (3) or confident (4). One participant who self-rated as neutral shared, "As far as the planning and things, I have to be honest, I thought I was probably around a four until I started to work with someone who was trained to do this, and now I'd say I'm closer to a three. I'm learning more and more but it's a world that I wasn't trained in, it's just my experience, that's all I've had." Another participant who shared a self-rating of confident explained, "I think I have a pretty good idea of some of the different things to think about, as far as safety and threats to our building. There's always something that I'm sure that we missed. I think we got everything now with the police officer coming up and doing [a site] assessment. Ideally, there's things that we cannot change about the way the district is set up and the way the building is set up. But as far as meeting with the team and going through processes, procedures, and things like that? I think I did a pretty good job."

4.1.2.1 Verbal persuasion

To further answer the research question, participants were asked to share any feedback related to their involvement in crisis response and planning. As Bandura (1989) notes, efficacy often develops through verbal persuasion, or feedback from others. The impact of the feedback varies significantly depending on the perceived credibility of the person who is offering the comments, including their reputation, reliability, expertise, and confidence (Bandura, 1977). Coding revealed a total of 42 references to feedback received by participants during the interviews. Table 14 provides a summary of the sources of verbal persuasion identified in participants' responses.

Table 14. Verbal Persuasion Related to School Crisis Work Received by Participants

Source of Verbal Persuasion	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Total Responses	Number of Participants Reporting
Law Enforcement	11	26.2%	7
Colleague	11	26.2%	5
Supervisee	10	23.8%	6
Community	5	11.9%	4
Supervisor	3	7.1%	2
Expert in the Field	2	4.8%	2

Law enforcement and colleagues were the most frequently cited sources of feedback; however, more participants reported receiving feedback from law enforcement. This is consistent with two previous findings: (a) that violent intruder/options-based security response protocols have been the most prevalent focus of school leaders' crisis work, and (b) that school leaders have learned about crisis planning through vicarious learning experiences involving first responders. It should be noted that the least cited sources of feedback for participants include their supervisors and experts in the field. This finding is also consistent with previous findings, indicating: (a) district leaders may have limited understanding of school crisis planning, and (b) school leaders have little to no exposure to expertise in the field of school crisis planning. These are important findings that have implications for practice that will be discussed in Chapter 5.

When asked about how the feedback made participants feel about their involvement in school crisis work, 90% of participants reported feeling a boost in confidence. Upon further analysis, these confidence gains fell into two main categories. Increases in self-confidence in their

involvement with school crisis work were reported by 44.4% of participants. For instance, Bridget shared, “For me, I think it sort of made me say, ‘Okay, this is something that I might be good at.’ You know?” The remaining 55.6% of responses referred to participants’ increased confidence in the planning process. One participant, James expressed, “[The feedback] made me feel like we were moving in the right direction.”

4.1.2.2 Emotional response

Interviewees were asked about their feelings related to their efforts in school crisis planning. According to Bandura (1977), our emotional state plays a key role in the development of our perceptions of self-efficacy. Coding revealed a total of 128 references to emotional responses during the interviews. A summary of the participants’ responses is included in Table 15.

Table 15. Participants’ Emotional Responses to School Crisis Incidents

Emotional Response	Number of Occurrences	Percentage of Total Responses	Number of Participants Reporting
Uncertainty	34	26.6%	8
Steadfast	31	24.2%	8
Calm	24	18.8%	8
Overwhelm	21	16.4%	8
Distress	18	14.1%	8

It should be noted that participants often reported feeling a combination of emotions, leading the researcher to apply multiple child codes to a single response. For example, Bridget

noted, “I feel like we should probably be doing more, but I don't know how much more.” This response includes both a sense of determination to take on the task of crisis planning, while also expressing uncertainty about how to proceed.

The most frequently reported emotional response was uncertainty. In this context, uncertainty is defined as feeling unsure, unassured, or doubtful. Participants’ feelings of uncertainty fell into two main categories. Of the 34 occurrences, 79.4% (27/34) referred to the process of crisis planning, including what role participants play in the process and/or how to proceed within a given context. One participant, Claudia shared, “[When it comes to the] safety stuff, not really knowing what the true best practices are. There's a lot of stuff that's out there and you're just hoping that, God forbid, it just doesn't happen in your building. You're just doing the best that you can and asking yourself, ‘Is this right?’ You try to ask other people, and you find out [they’re doing something different].” Another participant, Amina, discussed the uncertainty that comes with frequently changing protocols and practices. “Is that best practice? I don't know but it's what we were doing. We thought it was best with the information we had at the time.”

The remaining 20.6% (7/27) occurrences of uncertainty referred to the reactions and abilities of members of the staff. For example, James explained, “So I think sometimes we do all this, but then we expect our staff to have the same sense of things as we do or the same sense of our teacher leaders. We'll call together a crisis team of the people that we feel can handle this. But we want all the staff to be able to handle it and they don't. And that's what I struggle with. How do you teach that?” Another participant, Camilla noted, “The staff want you to give them answers. If this happens, this is what you have to do. You always have to do this. If this happens, you have to do that. I tell them all the time, ‘I cannot tell you what to do. You're an adult, you are

a professional. You have to make the best decision possible.' Teachers don't want to make the wrong choice, but I can't tell them what to do in those situations. They just have to do it."

Nearly one-fourth of the mentions of emotional reactions referred to participants feeling steadfast and resolute in their commitment to the work necessary to keep their school communities safe. For instance, Camilla shared, "You have to be ready for anything. And if you're not, then you need to find a new job. And I truly believe that. And I'm not saying that my choices in those situations would always be the right ones, but they're going to be the ones that I think are right at that particular moment."

As participants shared their experiences, 80% of participants mentioned their ability to remain calm and composed when under stress or pressure, representing nearly 19% of the emotional responses. Sailee explained, "I think it's also just your personality to some degree. I don't get easily rattled and I can remain calm through probably more situations than I should remain calm through." Another participant, Lena shared, "I've always been one who, when crisis mode comes, I go into a real calm, thinking sequentially. I don't get flustered. I just, I never have." Yet another participant, Matej states, "You have to be able to try to keep a clear head, a calm demeanor. Because then you also have to be calm for the people that you have to treat and help. And if you're freaking out, you're not helping them stay calm." It became clear that participants perceived the ability to remain calm as an important quality for successful school crisis leadership.

Interestingly, 80% of participants also referred to feeling distressed, defined as anxious, worried, or uncomfortable, when sharing about their experiences related to school crisis work. For example, Claudia shared, "When you're doing these exercises you're running around the building and all that you're on hyper drive. Your adrenaline's running. Your amygdala is on overdrive." Another participant, Bridget explained, "I feel like there's limited planning. It makes me nervous

because there were plans already in place when I arrived at the school. What makes me nervous is that we don't really talk about it, so I'm not sure people are familiar with it."

Finally, the majority of participants expressed feeling overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task of school crisis preparedness. Amina shared, "I tell myself not to get overwhelmed. But of course, I get overwhelmed because I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, but what if this happens tomorrow?' You know? We're not ready for it." Another participant, Bridget explained, "We have a lot to do. While we feel like we have things in place, I don't think anything was really finalized. They were there on paper, but we never talked through the different aspects or where we were missing pieces that we hadn't even thought about. We didn't go through many of the potential 'what ifs.'"

Bandura's (1977) framework also identifies physical reactions as factors influencing the development of self-efficacy. Some examples of physical reactions include sweating, increased heart rate, hives, light-headedness, or nausea. Interestingly, there were very few references made to physical responses. Two participants reported experiencing weight gain since becoming a principal, which were initially coded as physical reactions. Upon further analysis, both reports of weight gain co-occurred with an emotional response, either distress or overwhelm. This led the researcher to wonder whether the weight gain was a symptom of the participants' emotional reactions, as opposed to the crisis response efforts themselves.

4.1.3 What do elementary school principals say they need to develop higher levels of self-efficacy in planning for school crisis and safety?

To learn more about what participants need in order to increase their levels of confidence, they were asked to discuss the most helpful and influential experiences for developing their skillset for school crisis work. Of the ten participants, five identified vicarious learning opportunities as

having the greatest impact; however, how the participant experienced the modeling varied. For Matej, it was a collaborative partnership, “I'm going to say working with the police officers and the police force.” Lena noted that reading professional articles and attending trainings was most helpful. “[A colleague] would give us articles. And I think with those trainings you're forced to put yourself in a situation and think about your context. I think each administrator thinks differently about it because each building is different.”

Another four participants identified mastery experiences as being the most influential. As Sailee explained, “I think the experience of actually dealing with crises has helped me to plan. I'm very confident now that a medical emergency will be no big deal. After [COVID-19], I sure hope we have a pretty good reign on the next pandemic.” Isaac offered a similar anecdote, “Experience is everything. The more you deal with and experience these things, makes a big difference, because you can at least draw on it and think, ‘Okay, I've felt this before. I know I need to go do what I have to do.’”

One participant, James, reported that verbal persuasion was the most influential experience to developing the ability to effectively engage is school crisis work. “Just talking to people. Talking to your director of security, or teachers, or other principals in other districts. I feel that's the biggest [help], talking to other people to get their input and recommendations.”

To gain more insight into participants’ perceptions, they were asked to identify any skills or concepts related to school crisis work that they were interested in learning about more. A desire for clarity of their role and task was expressed by three of the ten participants. For instance, Bridget explained, “But that's where we don't have, and I know my current school doesn't, we don't have a set, ‘You are responsible for this. You are to do this,’ no matter what crisis comes up. Neither my current or previous schools have had that.” Similarly, Camilla shared, “Knowing what my role

is going to be in the event of an emergency. Would I be the main person that [the first responders are] talking to or is the district office taking over the scene with the police? I don't know. But then again, I guess it just depends on maybe what the scenario is."

Interestingly, only two of the ten participants discussed a desire for additional training opportunities. Isaac offered an interesting perspective about training drills, "Probably the biggest struggle for me is, if you think about all of our drills that we do, the principal's never in the drill. We're always out checking on everybody else, right? But what are we going to do when something actually happens? I think we need more opportunities to be a part of the drill with our staff." Another participant, James expressed a desire to focus on training opportunities to prepare for after the crisis. "I really want to look into mindfulness and how we come down from crisis. I haven't really looked into it and I need to because I think we need to figure out how we're going to help staff cope when it's over." School leaders feel immense pressure to maintain safe and orderly school environments for staff and students. More preparation in preparing for school crisis would undoubtedly help to lesson this burden. This led the researcher to wonder why so few participants noted a desire for additional training opportunities.

Three participants were unsure about any additional skills or concepts they felt would be beneficial to developing their skillset related to school crisis work. As Maeve noted, "I guess I don't know what I don't know. I'm sure there's more out there. I'm positive. I mean, I want to know more, but I don't really know other programs right now."

Now we turn to the discussion about the implications of these findings.

5.0 Discussion, Limitations, and Implications

Schools are entrusted to provide a safe and orderly environment for the nearly 55 million students attending K-12 schools across the nation each day (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). While federal and state legislators have enacted a number of policy mandates related to school safety, these mandates often lack specific guidelines or recommendations for implementation (Olinger Steeves et al., 2017). Thus, the responsibility of preventing potential threats to the school environment, identifying safety gaps, planning and budgeting for safety and security, and training staff falls upon district and school leaders (Trump, 2008).

This study attempted to better understand elementary school principals' thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to school crisis planning. Current research on self-efficacy and school crisis prevention and intervention provided the framework for this study. This chapter discusses the findings and limitations, as well as implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

5.1 Discussion

Principals have a wide variety of lived experiences managing crisis incidents in their buildings, as seen in Table 9. Curiously, even though no participants had experienced a violent intruder crisis incident during their tenure as a principal, more than half (51.4%) of the school crisis planning efforts they described focused on this topic. Moreover, planning for violent intruders is the only type of school crisis that every participant reported. Similarly, deaths within

the school community, violence/threats in the vicinity of the school campus, and child welfare concerns were among the most frequently experienced crises reported by participants. Yet, interviewees did not describe any planning for these types of crises.

The disproportionality of time, attention, and resources dedicated to implementing violent intruder/options-based response protocols, as compared to more common school crisis situations, is well documented in the literature on school crisis prevention and intervention. As Kerr and King (2018) notes, one of the key tenets of crisis planning is to attend to and plan for common crises. "Unfortunately, schools too often focus all their resources on the rare but highly publicized acts of terrorism and violence, overlooking threats that are more common" (Kerr & King, 2018, p. 94). While this study substantiates this notion, it also suggests that schools may not be simply *overlooking* the more common crises. Rather, this study indicates that school leaders hold significant misconceptions of what crisis planning actually entails and are woefully underprepared for the task.

To recall, the participants perceived school crisis planning differently than the experts in the field define school crisis planning. Most participants conceptualized crisis planning based upon their experiences implementing violent intruder/option-based response protocols. Although related, implementation of an already established crisis response protocol and comprehensive, multi-hazard school crisis planning are two very different concepts. The conflation of these concepts is likely a result of the field's limited preparation of principals around school crisis planning, coupled by the intense reaction to incidents of active shooters in schools (Cornell, 2003).

The similarities among principals' experiences with school crisis prevention and intervention are uncanny. It is clear that they feel an incredible burden of responsibility for protecting the safety and well-being of their students, staff, and school community. Yet, they lack

a full understanding of crisis planning concepts that would enable them to do so effectively. Their ambivalence leads to a great deal of "what if" stress that could be reduced if they were better equipped and supported for preparing for school crisis incidents. More preparation and training would undoubtedly help to ease this pressure for school leaders. Curiously, few participants noted a desire for additional training opportunities. It is suspected that this may be connected to the aforementioned disproportionality of time, effort, and resources that have already been dedicated to implementing violent intruder/options-based security response protocols and the misconceptions that school leaders have about comprehensive school crisis planning.

It appears that school leaders may not be the only educational professionals who lack knowledge around effective school crisis planning. This study revealed that more than 75% of vicarious learning experiences related to crisis planning come from trainings and collaboration with first responders and experts in the field. Yet learning from their supervisors accounted for fewer than 3% of the participants' experiences. Similarly, over 75% of the feedback participants received related to their work in school crisis planning came from law enforcement, colleagues, or members of their staff. Less than 10% of the feedback received by participants came from their supervisors. The lack of modeling and feedback provided by supervisors may indicate that district level leaders also have limited exposure and understanding of crisis planning, despite being responsible for the task in practice.

It is not surprising that when faced with a question about school crisis planning, the interviewees answered with the plan that is most explicit to them. Principal certification programs, induction programs, and continuing education requirements do not mandate coursework focused on crisis planning. Therefore, it is not surprising that leaders would defer to their most prevalent

experience with school crisis prevention and intervention, which is guiding staff, students, and their school communities through the implementation of violent intruder response protocols.

The conclusion of this study coincided with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of crisis planning was no more evident than in the response to this pandemic. Extended school closure is a functional annex that many district and school leaders did not have in place. Hence, they rushed to develop plans for providing continuity of education to students while buildings remained closed for several months. As the end of the 2019-2020 school year drew closer and leaders began focusing on recovery and reentry for the fall, the researcher observed fellow school leaders asking "What's the plan?" This aligns to the results of this study. Once again, leaders default to what they know from their previous experience, which is implementing an already developed protocol. Unlike violent intruders, however, a previously developed protocol does not exist for returning to school following a global pandemic. Instead, school leaders find themselves in uncharted waters. The lack of advanced planning has left them exhausted, overwhelmed, and underprepared for the task of developing a comprehensive plan that addresses prevention, mitigation, protection, response, recovery, and after-action review related to this global crisis.

5.2 Limitations

Before discussing the larger implications of this study's findings, it is critical to review its limitations. Although the data collection and analysis plan reduced the number of potential limitations, no research study exists without some limitations. The most notable limitation is the generalizability of the study's findings. The sample size (i.e., 10 participants) and use of a small,

somewhat homogenous research region limits conclusions to describing the phenomenon under investigation as a representation of the school leaders studied. The findings then, represent a specific relationship to the region, the time the study was completed, and the perspectives of the participants (Thorne, 2008). Although efforts were made to recruit participants with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, further research is needed to ensure the conclusions are representative of a larger population of educators.

Another limitation to this study is the recruitment design. Soliciting volunteers likely led to a sample of participants who have some level of interest or experience with crisis leadership and/or planning. It would be interesting to replicate this study within a single organization or recruitment area, but interview all elementary school principals, as opposed to only a few volunteers. This would also increase the amount of data gathered, which would help to address the aforementioned limitation of sample size and generalizability.

As a novice interviewer, the type of questions asked of the participants presents another limitation. Questions asked participants to recall experiences and describe their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. According to Thorne (2008), "we are well aware that 'what' we talk about and 'how' we talk about it are highly socially constructed" (p. 128). Although safeguards were put in place to ensure participants' anonymity, principals may have altered their responses based upon social conventions for organizational loyalty and individual credibility.

Upon review of the interview transcripts, the researcher found many missed opportunities to ask participants to clarify or provide additional information or details. Occasionally, the participants shared a lot of anecdotal information, but did not answer the question. For instance, when asked about planning efforts, some participants shared about feedback that was received; however, the interviewer neglected to probe more deeply about the impact the feedback had on the

participant. A more experienced interviewer would have likely capitalized on these opportunities for further examination of participants' perspectives.

It is suspected that the timing and context of current events play a significant role in the results of this study. As previously mentioned, this study concluded as the COVID-19 pandemic began. It is likely that if this study were to be replicated, participants' would share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to extended school closures and ensuring the physical and emotional health and safety of their school communities.

Finally, one might ask why the interviewer did not define the concept of crisis planning for participants. The focus of this study was to learn more about the participants' own perceptions of themselves and their experiences as crisis planners. Although unintended, this resulted in an important outcome. We now have an understanding about the misconceptions that exist among elementary school principals' understanding of crisis planning. Replicating this study with a clearer definition of the concept of crisis planning would likely yield different responses but would also provide interesting data to contribute to the field.

5.3 Implications

This section describes the implications of the study's findings for both research and practice. The findings address the current gap in the literature and suggest opportunities for future research. The implications for practice include the impact on the safety of the school community, school leaders' overall well-being, and opportunities for professional development.

5.3.1 Implications for research

Current literature on school crisis prevention and intervention attempts to define the characteristics of a school crisis and emphasize the importance for school leaders to attend to emergency preparedness. While experts in the field agree that crisis planning is imperative for schools, it is complex and challenging work (Olinger Steeves et al., 2017). Yet, should an emergency occur, schools are expected to respond immediately, deliberately, and effectively (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Given these claims and the ever-evolving landscape of our modern society, ongoing research is needed to identify and refine the best practices for school crisis prevention and intervention.

Additionally, research supports the powerful influence that efficacy beliefs have on our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Since people differ in the areas in which they develop their knowledge and skills, perceptions of self-efficacy are context-specific (Bandura, 2006). The connection between school leaders' perceptions of self-efficacy and school crisis prevention and intervention comprises the research gap under investigation in this study. Due to the exploratory nature of this study and the identified limitations, further research is necessary to attempt to make generalizations about school leaders and their role as crisis planners. Potential subsequent studies could include interviews with principals at the secondary level, so that the entire K-12 continuum is represented in the data. Considering that supervisors played an infrequent role in principals' learning in this study, it would also be beneficial to investigate district-level leaders' experiences and perceptions related to crisis planning. Finally, it is possible that the recruitment method may have had an impact on the sample. Soliciting volunteers may result in participants who have a particular interest in the subject matter or desire to learn more. It would be interesting to replicate

this study within an organization or consortium, but include all school leaders, as opposed to soliciting volunteers. This will allow all experiences and perceptions to be included in the data.

Future study could also include an examination of the sources of self-efficacy development in order to determine which source(s) yields the highest increases in school leaders' confidence in the area of crisis prevention and intervention. Self-efficacy beliefs are developed based upon performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and emotional/physical reactions (Bandura, 1989). Bandura (1977) notes that previous successes and learning from others as the most influential in increasing confidence levels. Participants in this study corroborated this claim, with 90% citing previous successes and learning from others (i.e., first responders, colleagues) as particularly effective in developing their confidence as crisis planners. Yet, through their interviews, participants referred to their emotional responses at a significantly higher rate than any other efficacy source. In fact, the total number of references to performance accomplishments and vicarious learning combined (i.e., 120), fell short of those made to emotional reactions alone (i.e., 128). Perhaps this is due to the emotional nature of school crisis. A study could be designed to better understand the influence emotional responses have on the development of school leaders' perceptions of self-efficacy as crisis leaders.

Finally, given the frequency with which participants discussed their emotions throughout their interviews, it would be interesting to design a study that explores leaders' emotions related to their role with crisis prevention and intervention. Some suggested frameworks could include emotional labor, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue.

5.3.2 Implications for practice

The findings of this study provide some insight into elementary school principals' perspectives related to planning for school crisis and safety. In addition to research implications, the findings also have practical implications for the field of education. First, school leaders believe they are making efforts to plan for school crisis, when they are dedicating the vast majority of their time to planning for one particular school crisis (violent intruder) that is actually quite rare. Therefore, many of the most common crises are overlooked and response is reactive and inconsistent. This can lead to dangerous repercussions to the safety and well-being of the school community and its members.

Additionally, navigating a crisis situation without a clear plan can increase stress levels during an already intense and difficult time. This is no more evident than the most recent COVID-19 pandemic. School leaders across the country and globe were left scurrying to develop a plan for supporting their students, staff, and school communities. Had functional annexes been established for extended school closures, the response would have been less stressful and overwhelming. In our everchanging global society, incidents of crisis seem to be emerging more frequently than ever before. To protect the overall well-being of school leaders and the communities they serve, it is imperative that time and attention be dedicated to comprehensive school crisis planning.

To successfully achieve this task, additional learning opportunities focused on crisis leadership are necessary. This begins with principal preparation programs. Coursework on school crisis leadership should be a required component for certification. Additionally, ongoing professional development in this area should be provided to current school and district level leaders. It would be beneficial for the trainings and workshops to be led by experts in the field of

school crisis prevention and intervention, as well as first responders law. Another potential support could include establishing a professional network specifically designed for school and district level leaders to collaborate about planning for school crisis. As one participant noted, “Isn't it a shame that we can all see the problem, but there's not a university yet that has made it a required course for principals, or even made it an online course that's a [requirement for leaders]. We know we're going to be dealing with this. Why aren't we [preparing for it]? Somebody's got to start training principals in this stuff.”

5.4 Conclusions and Recommendations

The contribution from these findings is a greater understanding of elementary school principals’ thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to school crisis planning. Most specifically, (a) principals experience a wide variety of crisis incidents that impact their school communities; (b) principals have limited exposure to and understanding of comprehensive, multi-hazard crisis planning; and (c) principals are dedicated and caring leaders who are eager to learn more about how to prepare for crisis incidents so that they can support their students, staff, and school communities. With this greater understanding about principals’ perceptions, we are called to continue to research the role of school leaders in crisis planning, as well as develop more appropriate and robust professional development opportunities for them. If schools are entrusted to provide safe and orderly environments for the nearly 55 million students attending K-12 school across the nation each day, then we owe it to our school leaders to provide them with the support needed to accomplish this task.

Appendix A – Letter of Invitation for Participants

Dear Elementary Principal,

My name is Nicci Giehll. I am conducting a research study as a doctoral candidate at the University of Pittsburgh with the department of Administrative and Policy Studies. The study focuses on the growing role school leaders play in planning for school crisis and safety. Specifically, I'm interested in learning about the experiences and perceptions that elementary principals have related to crisis planning. The information collected from this study will inform my dissertation and add to the current body of literature on school crisis prevention and intervention.

If you have ever worked on planning for school crisis in your role as an elementary school principal, I'd love to hear from you. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. If you wish to participate, you will be asked to complete both a one-minute survey and a 45-minute interview at a day and time that is convenient for you.

The risk for your participation in this study is extremely low. You will be assigned an ID number and pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Your pseudonym, survey, and interview data will be kept under lock and key unless it is being used for analysis or for writing the final report. I will not divulge any identifiable information to anyone, including my research advisor. Also, at no time will your answers, refusal to respond to a question, or withdrawal affect your employment status or reputation as a professional.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration to contribute this research study. Should you choose to participate, please contact me by email (nlg31@pitt.edu) to set up a day, time, and location for the interview. I look forward to hearing from you by [date].

Respectfully,

Nicci Giehll

Appendix B – Consent Document

Study Title: Principals' Perceptions of Self-Efficacy as Crisis Leaders

Principal Investigator: Nicole Giehll, M.Ed, Graduate Student
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Introduction:

This research is being conducted to better understand the growing role school leaders play in planning for school crisis and safety. Research indicates that self-efficacy plays a powerful role in behavioral intentions and emotional responses. Specifically, I'm interested in learning about the experiences and perceptions that elementary principals have related to school crisis planning. The goal of the study is to add to the body of school crisis prevention and intervention literature and inform future research in education.

Potential participants in this study include current public school principals and assistant principals serving within the K-8 grade range in the Western Pennsylvania region, who have at least one calendar year of experience. A total of ten school leaders will be enrolled in this study.

If you agree to participate, your participation includes a one-minute survey and a 45-minute interview session. The initial survey asks you to divulge basic information about your gender, the grade range of your school, and total years of experience in education and as a school leader. Next, with your permission, I will audio-record our interview session. During the interview, you will be asked to describe your involvement in crisis planning for your school or district. You will also be asked about any training you have received or resources you have referenced on the topic of crisis planning.

Participation in this study is confidential. At no point will your supervisor be notified of your enrollment, nor will they be informed of your responses. All survey and interview responses are

confidential. Authorized representatives of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Research Protections may review your identifiable research information for the purpose of monitoring the appropriate conduct of this research study. In unusual cases, the investigators may be required to release identifiable information related to your participation in this research study in response to an order from a court of law. If the investigators learn that you or someone with whom you are involved is in serious danger or potential harm, they will need to inform, as required by Pennsylvania law, the appropriate agencies.

I ask that you refrain from using student or colleague names during the interview process to ensure confidentiality. Participants will be given an ID number and pseudonym for the purpose of this study. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. All interview transcripts, findings, and pseudonym identification linking documents will be kept under lock and key or in password-protected files. Following analysis, all audio recordings will be deleted.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. There are no costs, compensation, or incentives associated with participation. You may stop completing the survey, refuse to answer any interview questions, or withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any recordings, transcripts, surveys, data gathered, or reports generated will be destroyed. Your decision to participate or withdraw from the study will at no time affect your relationship to the University of Pittsburgh, your current or future work as an educational leader or your reputation as a professional. To withdraw from the study after today, please provide me with a written and dated notice of your decision. Due to the nature of this study, there would be no reason for me to withdraw you from this study without your consent.

The risk for this study includes a potential breach of confidentiality; however, strict protocols are in place to minimize that risk. There is no direct or foreseeable benefit associated with your participation in this research study. The questions you will be asked pertain only to the daily duties and interactions necessary in the performance of your job responsibilities. The findings will only be used for the purpose of research and no identifiers will be recorded on the audio file or with the data.

Questions About the Study:

The principal investigator for this study is Nicole Giehll. If you have any questions or wish to gain a copy of the findings, you may reach Nicci at 412-648-7205. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to talk to someone other than the research team, please call the University of Pittsburgh Human Subjects Protections Advocate toll-free at 866- 212-2688.

Consent to Participate:

The above information has been explained to me and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions, voice concerns or complaints about any aspect of this research study during the course of the study, and that such future questions,

concerns or complaints will be answered by a qualified individual or by the investigator listed on the first page of this consent document at the telephone number given.

I understand that I may always request that a listed investigator address my questions, concerns, or complaints. I understand that I may contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations that occurred during my participation. A copy of this consent form will be given to me.

Investigator Certification:

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the participant, and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual(s) have about this study have been answered, and we will always be available to address future questions, concerns, or complaints as they arise. I further certify that no research component of this protocol began until after this consent form was provided to the participant and reviewed in its entirety.

Nicole Giehll
Principal Investigator

Appendix C – Survey

Study Title: Principals' Perceptions of Self-Efficacy as Crisis Leaders

1. **How do you identify your gender?**

   _____

2. **What is the grade range of your current school?**

   _____

3. **How many years have you been a building principal?**

   _____

4. **How long have you been in the field of education?**

   1 – 5 years

   5 – 10 years

   10 – 15 years

   15 – 20 years

   over 20 years

Appendix D – Interview Protocol

Study Title: Elementary School Principals' Perceptions of Self-Efficacy as School Crisis and Safety Planners

Interview Script

We all know the important role that principals play in the success of their schools. In their daily work, school leaders engage in a variety of tasks and are constantly making decisions that impact their school communities. A growing area of focus for school leaders is crisis management. For the purposes of this study, I'm specifically interested in learning about elementary principals' experience with planning for school crisis and safety. Let's walk through a few of your experiences with crisis planning.

I'm wondering, since you've been a principal, have you ever responded to a crisis that affected your school community (i.e. death of a staff member/student, bus accident, medical emergency, severe weather/natural disaster, violence)? Can you walk me through your experience?

Probe: How did you feel during this time?

Probe (if necessary): How was the crisis resolved?

Allow participants time to answer.

In your opinion, was this a successful resolution?

Probe: What makes you say that?

Allow participants time to answer.

Thank you for sharing your experience with me. Can you tell me when this incident occurred in your career?

Allow participants time to answer.

I'm curious to hear about any of the ways you have been involved in crisis planning for your school or district? What can you tell me about your involvement?

Allow participants time to answer

What did you use to figure out this plan?

Allow participants time to answer

Thank you, your insights into your experiences are valuable to this study.

Pause

On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being absolutely confident in your planning, and 1 being very unsure) how well do you think you did in this role? *If necessary*: What makes you say that?

Allow participants time to answer.

Did you get any feedback from others? *If necessary:* Can you share the feedback you received?

Allow participants time to answer.

How did that feedback make you feel?

Allow participants time to answer.

How do you think you learned how to do crisis planning?

Allow participants time to answer.

Can you tell me about any training opportunities, workshops, or reading you've completed on school crisis and safety planning that we haven't already talked about?

Allow participants time to answer.

Thinking about all of your experiences, which have helped you in your ability to plan for school crisis and safety? *If necessary:* Why do these experiences stand out as being the most influential?

Allow participants time to answer.

Are there skills/concepts that you would like to learn to be more confident in crisis planning?

Allow participants time to answer.

I know that we've been talking about crisis planning today, but there are a number of other "hats" that you wear as the building principal. That's what makes it such a complex and challenging position. In general, using the same 1-5 scale (with 5 being absolutely confident in your planning, and 1 being very unsure), how would you rate your level of confidence in your role as elementary school principal.

Thank you for all of your valuable insights and willingness to participate in this interview today. Is there anything that we missed that you want to tell me before we wrap up our time together?

Allow time for questions and answers.

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